

THE CLEARING
12171 Garret Bay Road
Ellison Bay
Door
Wisconsin

HALS WI-8
WI-8

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN LANDSCAPES SURVEY
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20240-0001

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THE CLEARING

HALS NO. WI-8

Location: 12171 Garret Bay Road, Ellison Bay, Door County, Wisconsin
Lat: 45.26504 Long: -87.06905

Significance: The Clearing embodies the theories and principles of renowned landscape architect Jens Jensen, who established it as a folk school and working educational environment between 1925 and 1949. The site provides an intact example of Jensen's ideals : the use of native species, careful pruning that takes advantage of natural views and light, the arrangement of elements to allow large vistas, the use of local materials in buildings designed by Jensen himself, council rings of differing sizes, and an outdoor amphitheater.

History: The 125-acre site on the Niagara escarpment limestone bluffs above Ellison Bay in northern Door County incorporates several rustic buildings, including a school and sleeping cabins, three council rings and an outdoor amphitheater. Rustic roads wind around a large central meadow, allowing access to the cluster of school structures, that are situated close to the steep bluffs that edge the site. Native plantings include hawthorns, cedars, native grasses and wildflowers. The landscape, designed by Jensen between 1929-49 embodies his landscape ideals, including the use of native plants and vegetation, natural settings, and local building materials.

The site, mainly former farmland and pasture, was purchased by Jensen in 1919 while he was working for the Chicago Park System; it originally was intended to serve as a retreat for his family. After his wife's death in 1935, Jensen relocated permanently to Ellison Bay. Over the next few years, Jensen constructed buildings and established "The Clearing" as a folk school, based on his memories of similar "schools of the soil" in his native Denmark. His philosophy was that work and play in the natural landscape afforded students a "clearing of the mind."

After Jensen's death in 1951, his assistant, Mertha Fulkerson continued to run the school with financial support from the Wisconsin Farm Bureau. Today, a separate organization, the Friends of the Clearing continue to offer year-round classes, including several with folk-art themes in a serene and rustic environment.

Sources: Grese, Robert. Jens Jensen: Maker of Natural Parks and Gardens. Baltimore,MD.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992

Jensen, Jens. Siftings. Chicago, IL: R.F.Seymour, 1939

Telfer, Sid, Sr. The Jens Jensen I Knew. Ellison Bay, WI: Driftwood Farms Press, 1982.

State Historical Society of Wisconsin, State Historic Preservation Office. "The Clearing" (no author listed). Madison: 1974 (National Register of Historic Places Inventory Nomination Form).

<http://theclearing.org/index.php>

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Looking out over Ellison Bay from The Clearing site (Arnold Alanen, 2000).



Council ring at The Clearing (Arnold Alanen, 2000).